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A
MEMOIR
OF
GENERAL JOHN COFFIN,

COMPILED FROM VARIOUS SOURCES,

BY HIS THIRD SON,

E
CAPTAIN HENRY, COFFIN, R.N.

*For the purpose of distribution amongst his
relations and friends.*

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MEMOIR
OF
GENERAL JOHN COFFIN.

THE subject of the following memoir, General John Coffin, was the third son of Mr. Nathaniel Coffin, Cashier of Customs at Boston, Capital of the State of Massachusetts, at that time a Colony of Great Britain.

John Coffin was descended from a long line of Knights and Valiant men—for, we find Sir Richard Coffin, as far back as the days of King Henry 2nd. The most ancient seat of the name and family, called Portledge, is in the Parish of Alwington, bordering on the Severn Sea, about six leagues to the E. of the Isle of Lundy: and the Manor of Alwington has been in the family of Coffin from the time of the Norman Conquest.

This ancient family originally came from Siez, in Normandy; and at a recent date, the compiler of this Memoir saw the ruins of the Chateau, in which the Coffin family dwelt. They came over to England before the Norman Conquest, and settled in Somerset and Devon; and, at the time of the Great Survey of all Lands—ordered by William the Conqueror, the Coffins are mentioned in Dooms-day Book, as being possessed of several hides of land. The above, and the following extracts, are from Sir William Pole's M.S. of "Devon, and its Knights, in the Reigns of the earlier Kings of England." As a further evidence of the antiquity of this Gentle Family, there is a boundary deed, (a copy whereof is in my custody,) made near the Conquest, written in the Saxon tongue, which giveth good confirmation thereof; which said deed expresseth the bounds between the lands of Richard Coffin, Lord of the Manor of Alwington, and Cokeweston, and the Abbot of Tavistock, in relation to the lands belonging to that Abbey in the near adjoining Parish of Abbotsham. Some of the terms and articles of

which agreement between them are these:—that the Abbot and convent of Tavistock should give to the said Richard Coffin, and his next heir, full fraternity in his Church of Tavistock, to receive there the habit of religion wheresoever, (God so inspiring) they would, and that in the mean time he should have the privilege of one monk there. The family very early spread itself into several branches, which flourished so well in divers places of this city, that they left their name and adjunct to them, *as* Combe-Coffin, now Combe-Pyne in the East part; Coffin's Well in the South part; and Coffin's Jugarly in the West part of this province; in which last place the Mansion House was near the Church, to which was belonging a fair deer park, now wholly demolished. Nor is it less observable that some of those places yielded gentlemen with gilded spurs, as Sir Jeffry Coffin, of Combe-Coffin, in the days of King Henry III. and before that, Sir Elias Coffin, of Jugarly (called also Sir Elias Coffin of Argot), in the days of King John of England. As to the family of Alwington,—one notes from the time of King Henry I. unto the age of King Edward II. (the space of above 200 years), that the heirs of this family were always called Richard; as for example—Sir Richard Coffin, of Alwington, Knight, in the reign of Henry II. Sir Richard Coffin, of Alwington, in the reign of Edward I. and Sir Richard Coffin, in the days of Henry IV.; and again—a century afterwards Richard Coffin was High Sheriff of the County of Devon, in the 2nd year of King Henry VIII.: his education, and accomplishments were such that they introduced him with advantage to the Court of King Henry VIII. where he came highly to be preferred, first, to the Honorable post of Master of the Horse, at the Coronation of Queen Anne Boleyn, (Mother to the glorious Queen Elizabeth), Anno 25 of that King, and after that to the honour of Knighthood in the 29th year of the same reign. He was also one of the Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber to the same King,—a place of great reputation, and trust; whose office is to wait on the King, within doors and without, so long as his Majesty is on foot; and when the King eats in his Privy Chamber, they wait at table, and bring in the meat; they wait also at the reception of Amba-

sadors, and every night two of them lie in the King's Privy Chamber. They are forty-eight in number, all Knights, or Esquires of note, whose power is great; for, a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber, by the King's command only, without any written commission, is sufficient to arrest a Peer of England.

We also find the following entry in Hutching's History of Dorset, Vol. 1, page 468, Parish of Wambrook. "This little village, now a distinct Parish, was anciently part of Chadstock, from which it lies about two miles N., on the very borders of the County adjoining Somersetshire. A family of the Percys were its ancient Lords. It afterwards came to the Filiols, of Woodlands, who held it from the 3rd of Henry V. to the 19th of Henry VIII. In the 22nd of Henry VIII. on the partition of Sir William Filiol's property, this manor was assigned to Sir Edward Kymer; after this it passed to several private persons or owners. In 1645, Mr. Humphrey Coffin, Recusant, had his old rents here, and his lands valued in 1641, at £30 per annum, sequestered.— In 1645, Mr. John Coffin's term here, valued at £45 per annum: was sequestered."

In the additions to this volume the Editor says:—

"Of the family of Coffin which came from Thorn Coffin, Co. of Somerset, where they were settled in the reign of Edward II. was Sir William Coffin, Knight, who was buried in Standon Church, Hereford, with this epitaph."

"Here lieth William Coffin, Knight, sometime of the Privy Chamber with his Sovereign Lord, King Henry VIII.; and Master of the Horse unto Queen Jane, the most lawful Wife unto the aforesaid King Henry VIII. and High Steward of all the Liberty and Manor of Standon, in the county of Hereford, which William deceased the 8th day of December, in the Year of Our Lord, 1538, the 30th of the reign of King Henry VIII."

This inscription is engraved in the style and spelling which prevailed at the time.

The Coffin family has been allied by intermarriages, with the Honourable Houses of Chudleigh, Carey, Courtney, Beaumont, Prideaux, Clifford, &c. &c. and even with Royalty, having married

grand-daughters and great-grand-daughters of William the Conqueror, Henry I. and Edward I. There are two versions of the reason of the exile of this fine old family, from its native land.

They were devoted Royalists during the time and troubles of Charles I, and were fated then and a century later, to lose all they had, from siding with their sovereign. On the death of the First Charles, and the escape of the Second, the Coffins found themselves proscribed, and in great measure deprived of their Estates. Colonel Coffin, then Governor of Plymouth, prepared a vessel, and when he could no longer hold the Citadel against the Parliamentary forces, embarked with his family for America, arrived in safety, and settled in the Township of Salisbury, near Newbury Port, State of Massachusetts. The other version of the exile of the Coffin Family, was thus related to the compiler of this simple memoir. After Charles II. made his escape to France, the head of the family, like many other Royalists, after a time, took service with Oliver Cromwell, and when his son succeeded to the Protectorship, General Monk had arranged to bring Charles II. back to England, Colonel Tristram Coffin of Brixton, near Kitley, County Devon, being then Governor of Plymouth, and expecting nothing but persecution from Charles II. resigned the command of the Citadel, and embarked for America, on his arrival in which country, he settled with his family, at Newbury Port. Colonel Coffin left his only daughter in England, on the estate of Brixton, to preserve the property to the family, and she married a Mr. Pine, who took the name of Coffin, and whose descendants hold the Portledge property to this day.

Mr. Nathaniel Coffin, the father of General John Coffin, was born in the early part of the 18th century; and received his education at Cambridge College, near Boston; where his brothers were also educated.

Mr. Nathaniel Coffin was brought up as a merchant; when about thirty years of age, he received from England the appointment of Cashier of Customs, at Boston. Being a prosperous man, Mr. Coffin soon acquired a considerable property in the town. His son John, born in Boston, 1756, was sent to sea at a very

early age, and served his time in a Boston Ship; being an active young man he soon rose in the estimation of his Captain: in due time became Chief-mate, and soon after was placed in command of the ship, at the early age of eighteen. In 1774, Mr. John Coffin brought his ship to England; the following year the Government took her up amongst others for the conveyance of troops to America, where the war had commenced. He had on board nearly a whole Regiment with General Howe (in command of the troops), who was ordered out to supersede General Gage, at Boston. The vessel arrived at Boston, on the 15th of June, Mr. Coffin landed the Regiment immediately under Bunker's Hill, and the action having already commenced (17th June, 1775), he was requested by the Colonel "to come up and see the fun;" the only weapon at hand being the tiller of his boat, he immediately (to use a nautical phrase) unshipped it, and with equal determination commenced laying about him, and shipped the powder and belt, and musket of the first men he knocked down, and bore an active part during the rest of the action. In consideration of his gallant conduct, he was presented to General Gage after the battle, and made an Ensign on the field; shortly after he was promoted to a Lieutenant, but still retained the command of his ship. Sir William Howe had promised Mr. Coffin, on his arrival at Boston, the command of 400 men, if he would go to New York and raise them. He accordingly sailed for that city in March, 1776, when the Royalist Troops evacuated Boston, and all the Royalists left for New York and England; among those who crossed the ocean were Mr. Nathaniel Coffin and his family. In 1776, the loyalty, by which the Coffins in America distinguished themselves, having rendered them obnoxious to the republican government, they were compelled to return to their native land. The very serious steps taken by Mr. Nathaniel Coffin, when the British Army evacuated Boston, of leaving all his property, and attaching himself to the Government cause, not only deprived him, but all his family of every thing they possessed. On his arrival at New York in 1776, Mr. Coffin was persuaded by Lord William Howe, to proceed to England, lay his case before the British Govern-

ment, and ask for remuneration or a pension sufficient for the support of himself and his family; but after four years of incessant application, Lord North refused to give him anything. Being then *eighty* years of age, Mr. Coffin decided on returning to Boston to claim his property there, which had been sequestered by the United States Government, hoping for that justice and compassion from his enemies, which he had sought in vain at the hands of his own countrymen in his native land; he left Bristol in May, 1781, and arrived off Sandy Hook in the middle of June, where he was attacked by gout in the stomach, and died, the day before entering New York, in which city he was buried, in the Church-yard of the Church, near Astor House in Broadway. Mr. Coffin left four sons and four daughters; the eldest son Nathaniel was brought up to the bar, and succeeded well in his profession; of the second, there is no account; the third, John, was the subject of this sketch; and the fourth, Isaac, died an Admiral in the Royal Navy, and a Baronet, in the year 1839, at Cheltenham, 82 years of age, and his name will long be remembered in the British Navy as one of the bravest and best Officers.

The four daughters all married in England; but singular to say that only two of the whole family, left any children. Owing to the decided part Mr. Coffin's sons took in the American war, they were, at the peace of 1783, deprived of all their property, which was something considerable, having been recently valued by a person in Boston, as worth a million of dollars. Mr. John Coffin remained at New York; raised a mounted-rifle corps, called the "Orange Rangers," of which he was made Commandant, and from which, he exchanged into the New York Volunteers in 1778. He took part in the battle of Long Island, in the year 1777, and also in those of Germans Town and St. Lucie 1778, in Briars Creek 1779, and Camden 1780. We have no record of his gallant bearing in these actions; but of the subsequent ones we have the following authentic accounts in the "History of the American War," in the Southern States, where Captain Coffin took part in the actions of Hampton, Hobkirk's Hill, and Entaw Springs, all of which were fought during the year 1781.

The following descriptions of the battles of Hobkirk's Hill and Eutaw Springs, are extracts from the history of the war in the Southern States of America, by General Green, in command of the American Forces.

The battle of Hobkirk's Hill took place on the 25th of April, 1781.

Near the town of Camden, in South Carolina, stands Hobkirk's Hill; it is a narrow sandridge of very little elevation, in which are the head springs of two small branches of the River Santee, the one running into the Wateree, the other into Pine Tree Creek; the latter forms what is called Nury Branch, which winds South-Eastward into the principal stream, and with it forms a continual swamp. In front of this swamp, on the South side of the town of Camden, the Royalist Troops were posted; a swelling ground formed a covert communication from the camp, into the woods that bordered these streams, and stretched round to the foot of Hobkirk's Hill. Thus the movements of the British Army were imperceptible at any point beyond their advanced redoubt, until they approached within gun shot of the American sentinels. But it was found impracticable for Lord Rawdon to pursue this route and take with him his Artillery; he believed however, on the best grounds—intelligence from a deserter,—that his adversary would in this respect be no better off than himself. The American General did not think it necessary to change the order of his line, from that in which the arms had been stacked after their morning's exercise; but bringing up the Artillery to his centre, he posted it on the road, and ordering Colonel Washington and Colonel Reid to hold themselves in reserve, calmly awaited the appearance of the enemy.

Lord Rawdon's line was composed of the 63rd Regiment on the right, the New York Volunteers in the centre, and the King's American Regiment on the left. The right was supported by the volunteers of Ireland, and the left by a detachment under Captain Robertson; the Regiment posted with the Cavalry was that raised in South Carolina, so that on this bloody day, the number of European troops engaged was small, as most of the British

troops had been raised in America. As nearly one half of Lord Rawdon's force was posted in reserve, the front, with which he advanced was comparatively small; that of the Americans presented their whole force, the 2nd Virginia Regiment, under General Hagar, on the right of the road; and the two Maryland Regiments, under Colonel Williams, on the left. The 1st Virginia Regiment, under Lieut. Colonel Campbell, was on the right of the whole; the 2nd Maryland, under Lieut. Colonel Ford, on the left; the 2nd Virginia, under Lieut. Colonel House, and the 1st Maryland, under Colonel Gumbo, formed the centre. Greene conjecturing, that the enemy was unapprised of the arrival of his Artillery, had closed the two centre Regiments upon the road, so that they were completely masked; when these two Regiments suddenly retired to the right and left, and the Artillery began to vomit showers of grape upon the enemy, the confusion and dismay were so conspicuous, that nothing more seemed wanting but to close upon their flanks, with the Regiments on the right and left: the orders from the American Commander were thus delivered—"Let the Cavalry make for their rear, Colonel Campbell wheel upon their left, and Colonel Ford upon their right, and the whole centre charge with trailed arms." But Green had no common adversary to deal with, in Lord Rawdon. The British supporting columns were instantly protruded; the American wings were quickly exposed to the disadvantage which they had hoped to impose upon the enemy, they were out flanked, their wings were enfiladed, and their rear threatened, the extreme right and left were necessarily checked and deflected; but no permanent effect could have resulted from this state of the wings, had not other occurrences produced worse results in the centre. The 1st Maryland Regiment, the 10th Legion of the Army, renowned for its former deeds, shrunk away in a panic which was not to be overcome. The first symptoms were exhibited by a firing contrary to orders; then the fall of a favourite Officer causing a halt in those nearest to him, the check was rapidly communicated, and a general panic ensued, which exhibited itself in a tendency to continue the retreat; nor did the mischief end here; Colonel Ford's Regiment, dispirited by the fall

of its leader, who fell pierced by a mortal wound, faltered, and was permitted to retire.

Nothing could exceed the disappointment of the American Commander at this moment; he spurred his horse to the extreme right, and was leading on Colonel Campbell's Regiment in person, when he was called away to restore order in the centre, but the effort was vain, and the only alternative was a retreat, during the execution of which the Artillery was exposed to imminent danger. As the British horse under Captain Coffin was ascending the hill in pursuit, Captain Smith was ordered to secure the Artillery at all hazards, and as the men appeared to be giving way, Greene galloped up alone, and dismounting, held his horse with one hand, while he seized the drag-ropes of the guns with the other. Smith's men now joined in the effort of dragging off the guns. When Coffin's corps appeared on the hill moving to the charge, Smith's little band poured into his ranks with such aim that they fled; again and again did Coffin return to the charge, and was foiled as before. At length the British Infantry joined in the pursuit; Smith's men fell fast, he was himself badly wounded; Coffin succeeded in forcing them, and every man was either killed or taken. At this crisis Washington charged the British and they fled. As soon as General Greene found his Artillery, ammunition, waggons, &c. safe, he issued orders to continue the retreat. Coffin, with his Cavalry, and some Infantry, were left on the field. On seeing this, Colonel Washington retired with his Cavalry into a thicket, sent forward a few of his men who came within a short distance of the enemy. Captain Coffin's horse, with the Infantry, immediately pursued them as far as the wood. Washington emerged from his hiding place, cut to pieces and dispersed the whole party. The Americans thus remained masters of the field.

The memorable battle of Eutaw Springs, was fought on the 8th of September, 1781.

The day was intensely hot; at four o'clock in the morning, the American Army moved from its bivouac. Their Cavalry amounted to about 200 men; the British had not above half the number, but they were commanded by an able officer, Captain Coffin.

On the evening of the 7th, it is an admitted fact, that General Stewart, the British Commander, was unapprized of the approach of the American Army, and so entirely secure did he feel in his position, that an unarmed party under a small escort, had been sent up the river, for the purpose of collecting the sweet potatoe. This party, commonly called a "rooting party," had advanced about three miles, and then turned towards the plantations on the river.

The first intelligence that Greene had approached within seven miles of his position, was communicated to Stewart by two of the North Carolina conscripts, who had deserted during the night. Captain Coffin was sent on to re-call the "rooting party," and to reconnoitre the American position. The American advance had already passed the road, when they were met by Captain Coffin, who immediately charged them with a confidence which betrayed his ignorance of its strength, and of the near approach of the main army. It required little effort to repulse the British Cavalry, but the probability that their main army was near at hand forbade a pursuit.

The firing at this point drew the attention of the rooting party out of the woods, and the whole fell into the hands of the enemy.

In the mean time Colonel Stewart had pushed forward a detachment of Infantry to a mile distant from the Eawtaws, with orders to engage the American troops, while he formed up his men and prepared for battle. But Greene, persuaded by the audacity of Coffin that the enemy was at hand, and wishing to have time for his raw troops to form with coolness, halted his columns.

At about 200 yards west of the Eutaw Springs, Stewart had drawn up his troops in one line, the Eutaw Creek effectually covered his right, and his left, which was in military language "in air," was supported by Coffin's Cavalry, and a respectable detachment of Infantry held in reserve, at a convenient distance in the rear of the left under cover of the wood. The ground on which the British Army was drawn up was altogether in wood, but at a small distance in the rear of this line was a cleared field, extending West, South, and East from the dwelling house, and bounded by

the Creek, formed by the Eutaw Springs, on the shores of which is a high bank, thickly covered with low wood.

The house was of brick, and strong enough to resist small arms, and surrounded with various offices of wood, one particularly, a barn of some size; in the open ground to the South and West was the British encampment, the tents of which were left standing.

The superiority of his enemy in Cavalry made it necessary that Colonel Stewart should cast his eye on the Eutaw House for retreat and support. To that, therefore, he directed the attention of Major Sheridan, with orders on the first symptoms of misfortune to throw himself into it, and cover the army from the upper windows.

On the right in the thickets which border the Creek, Major Majoribanks with 300 of his best troops was posted, with instructions from the Royalist Guard to watch the flank of the enemy. As soon as the skirmishing parties were cleared away, a steady and desperate conflict ensued, which between the Artillery was bloody and obstinate in the extreme. The Militia behaved with wonderful gallantry and perseverance. From the first commencement of the action, the Infantry of the American covering parties on the right and left had been steadily engaged. The Cavalry of the Legion by being on the American right, had been enabled to withdraw into the woods, and attend to its Infantry, without being exposed to the enemy's fire. In the meantime important changes were taking place along the front; the North Carolina Brigade yielded and fell back; the British left, elated at this, sprang forward and their line became deranged. This was the moment for which the American Commander had been waiting. Two Brigades received the order to advance with a shout, and anxious to wipe away the recollection of Hobkirk's Hill, rushed forward with trailed arms. Upon their approach, the British left commenced a retrograde movement in some disorder, but their centre and right still maintained an unbroken front, awaiting the impending charge with unshaken firmness; no troops ever came nearer. The left of the British centre appears to have been pressed upon and forced back by their own fugitives, and began to give

way from left to right; at that moment the Marylanders delivered their fire, the enemy yielded along their whole front, and shouts of victory resounded through the American lines. Why the American Cavalry did not now act has not been explained, we can only conjecture that it was prevented by one or both of two causes known to have existed on that day. Colonel Lee was generally absent from it during the action, bestowing his attention upon the progress of his Infantry, and Captain Coffin was in that quarter attending on the retreat of the British left. Coffin's force was probably superior to that of Lee in Cavalry; whether so superior as to justify the latter in not attempting the charge, could only have been decided by the attempt itself.

At this stage of the battle, Majoribanks still stood firm in the thickets that covered him. General Green soon saw that he must be dislodged, and issued orders accordingly, but Washington's Cavalry found it impossible to penetrate the wood. He then discovered that there was an interval between the British right and the Creek, by which he succeeded in gaining their rear. A sharp conflict ensued, in which the Americans had the advantage, and the field of battle was covered with dead and dying, the whole American line advancing rapidly and in order, and causing great consternation in the British Camp; every thing was given up for lost, the companies destroyed their stores, and the numerous retainers of the army took flight and spread alarm to the very gates of Charlestown. By this time Sheridan, with some of the routed companies, had thrown himself into the house, from which they could direct their fire with security. The whole British Army was now flying before the American bayonets, and as the retreat lay directly through the encampment, where their tents were all standing, here the American line got into irretrievable confusion, and the men became entirely unmanageable.

When the American officers had made their way through the encampment, they found themselves abandoned by nearly all their soldiers, and the sole marks for the party who now poured their fire from the windows of the house, where more of the British fugitives had collected.

Majoribanks and Coffin watchful of every advantage, now made simultaneous movements, the former from his thicket on the left, and the latter from the wood on the right of the American line. General Greene soon perceived the evil that threatened him, and not doubting that his Infantry (whose disorderly conduct he was not yet made acquainted with) would immediately dispose of Majoribanks, despatched Captain Pendleton with orders for the Legion Cavalry to fall upon Coffin and repulse him.

We give the result in Captain Pendleton's own language,—
 "When Coffin's Cavalry came out, General Greene sent me to Colonel Lee with orders to attack them." "When I arrived, Lee was not there, and the order was given to the next in command, who made the attack without success." By this time General Greene having ordered a retreat, Coffin, who certainly proved himself a brave and active officer on this day, had no sooner repulsed the Legion Cavalry, then he hastened on to charge the rear of the Americans now dispersed among the tents.

Colonel Hampton had been ordered up to the road to cover the retreat, at the same time that the order was issued to effect it, and he now charged upon Coffin with a vigor that was not to be resisted. Coffin met him with firmness, and a hand to hand conflict was for a while maintained.

But Coffin was obliged to retire, and in the ardour of pursuit, the American Cavalry approached so near Majoribanks and the picketed garden, as to receive from them a fatally destructive fire.

Colonel Polk, who commanded Hampton's left, and was, in consequence directly under its influence, describes it by remarking, that "he thought every man killed but himself." Colonel Hampton then rallied his scattered Cavalry, and resumed his station on the border of the wood. But before this could be effected, Majoribanks had taken advantage of the opening made by his fire to perform another gallant action, which was decisive of the fortune of the day. The Artillery of the second line had followed on as rapidly as it could, the pieces had scarcely opened their fire, when all the discharges from the house being directed upon the guns, very soon killed or disabled nearly the whole of the men. Majori-

banks was no sooner disembarrassed of Hampton's Cavalry, than he sallied into the field, seized the pieces and hurried them under the cover of the house. General Greene halted on the ground only long enough to collect his wounded, and leaving a strong picket under Colonel Hampton, he withdrew his army to Burdels, seven miles distant, as at no nearer point could water be found. The failure of the charge upon Coffin had passed under the eye of the whole army, and although his superiority in numbers may have been great at the commencement of the action, it must have been much diminished towards the close, after the combats and fatigues it had undergone. Captain Coffin received a handsome sword from Lord Cornwallis, with a letter in which the rank of Major was conferred upon him in acknowledgement of his valuable services on many occasions, but especially for having so greatly distinguished himself on this day. In many subsequent affairs, Coffin's Cavalry were found very efficient, and always were ready for any bold or brave deed.

From that period to the close of the American war, the name of Major Coffin is found mixed up with others, in the most desperate encounters, and ever coming off victorious, even by unwilling evidence from the enemy's ranks. Unfortunately no true history exists, of a struggle so little redounding to the credit of the British Army, consequently individual valour and high souled courage had little chance of being chronicled. When, from adverse circumstances, the British Army retired towards Charlestown, Lord Cornwallis having capitulated, Coffin was determined not to be taken by the Americans, who had offered 10,000 dollars for his head, so he cut his way through their troops to Charlestown; in this town he was well acquainted with a family of the name of Matthews, whom he used to visit, when the enemy held Charlestown, during which time he ran very great risks of being taken prisoner, in going to see Miss Ann Matthews, daughter of William Matthews, Esq., of St. John's Island, Charlestown, to whom he was eventually married in the year 1781. On the occasion of one visit, the house was searched for him by authority, and the gallant soldier took refuge under Miss

Matthew's ample dress; at that time ladies wore hoops, and they must have been of considerable size, when Major Coffin, who stood six feet two, and was proportionably stout, lay successfully concealed under one. When Charlestown was evacuated, Major Coffin made his way up to New York, crossed the Hudson, and although the Revolutionists were in hot pursuit, he arrived in safety, to the astonishment of the whole British Army, having successfully eluded the vigilance of numerous parties on his track determined to spare no pains to capture him. Although he closed his brilliant military career, as far as active service went, at the early age of *twenty-seven*, full of honour and glory, Lord Cornwallis himself having cordially expressed his great admiration for so distinguished an officer, still Major Coffin was not promoted as he *ought* to have been, at the Peace, to a Lieutenant Colonel; it was said, that he gave great offence to George the III, by exposing the cowardice of a natural son of his, during one of the Cavalry engagements; Lord William Howe, Lord Cornwallis, Lord Rawdon, and the Marquis of Hastings, exerted themselves to overcome the obstinacy of the King, but all to no purpose.

This gallant young officer and his brave men, were so much feared and disliked by the Americans, that Major Coffin was sent, as a matter of expediency, down to the British Province of New Brunswick. Government giving them leave to settle there, they arrived in October, 1783, when there were only two persons, traders in furs, in or near the Harbour of St. John's, in the province. Mr. Symonds and Mr. White kindly supplied the new comers with provisions, and they immediately commenced clearing and felling the timber. The severity of the weather rendered it highly necessary they should build their log huts as expeditiously as possible; but with all that industry and perseverance could achieve, they suffered direful hardships this first winter, particularly Mrs. Coffin, who had been delicately nurtured in a wealthy family, and a soft climate. The country surrounding the commodious harbour of St. John's was then an uncultivated, bleak, and almost uninhabited waste, and the young adventurer's first mishap, and a great one too considering all circumstances, was the loss of

his boots, in crossing a bit of swamp, now the Market Place of a thriving town, containing thirty-thousand inhabitants. But despondency had no place in Major Coffin's heart, and having selected some lots of ground about the Harbour, he proceeded energetically to explore the interior of the country or province. An ascent of about twelve miles up the River St. John, opened out a rich and lovely landscape,—hill and dale, magnificent woods, fine rivers, and lakes swarming with innumerable salmon, bass, schad, and myriads of smaller fish, promised every thing to willing hands and stout hearts. In this fine and fertile locality, Major Coffin purchased, for a trifle, a tract of land from Colonel Grazier, to whom it had been granted by Government; it became a very valuable property twenty years after. Four men were despatched up there to build a house during the winter, and in May, 1784, he and Mrs. Coffin, with their two children and household, composed of three black men and one black woman, brought from Charlestown, took possession of their new residence, and called it Alwington Manor, after the family estate in Devonshire, which belonged to them in the time of William the Conqueror. Two of the men and the woman proved good and faithful servants, and when the slaves were emancipated, they still remained with the family, till they could no longer work for it, and were then well cared for.

It was never intended that Major Coffin should do more than settle his gallant countrymen, and then return to England. He had several offers of appointments as Aid-de-camp to those General Officers who knew his worth, but steadily refused any, unless it were preceded by his promotion, which he had so bravely earned, and had every right to expect.

Major Coffin's energy and activity produced a rapid change; he was never conquered by any difficulty; a man of iron will, he had determined to make a prosperous colony out of a wilderness, and it pleased God to bless his efforts and allow him to do so. The province began to settle fast; Major Coffin was generous and kind, extending a helping hand to all. Saw and flour mills were erected, water conducted through dense woods, and over high

banks, for miles; reservoirs were formed, and mill dams constructed, all at an enormous outlay, owing to the scarcity of labour.

Clearings along the beautiful banks of the river, soon showed comfortable farms, with houses built on them, and stock furnished, without any return being required by the generous and noble minded landlord for three years; and generally, the provisions necessary for the subsistence of these novices in forest life were provided by the Major, from his own farm, during their first winter, that long, dreary, pinching season to a new settler.

Farming stock was imported from England and the United States, and often great losses were incurred. Major Coffin also imported implements of husbandry, with all the latest improvements, and distributed them among his tenants, and by his great and incessant exertions, he was able to add somewhat to the scantier stores of those who had been less successful than he had; for his benevolence and liberality knew no limits, and long will his name be honoured and blessed by the descendants of those early settlers.

Barrels of flour, Indian meal, salted salmon, loaves of sugar, coffee, tea, &c. &c. in considerable quantities, as well as the productions of the farm were among his most welcome gifts. Subsequently, Major Coffin was appointed superintendant of Indian affairs, and though he succeeded in gaining the affection of this singular and extraordinary people, in as extraordinary a manner, still his unceasing efforts to civilize and educate them, met with no adequate success. On numerous occasions, Major Coffin's foresight and determination of character were called into play, not only by the wily and treacherous Indian, but also by the grisley denizens of those illimitable forests, that, hitherto unchecked, had roamed the vast wilderness and untrodden wilds, monarchs of all they surveyed. One anecdote is well authenticated by his youngest daughter, whom he took with him, when a child of six or eight years old, in a small whale boat, down to the town of St. John's. The morning was lovely, and a westerly wind stirred the surface of the noble stream sufficiently, to render the services of one boatman only necessary. They had scarcely reached the opposite banks, when they descried an enormous bear chasing some cattle

on the side of the hill. As there was a man following him at some distance, the huge beast took to the water, when Major Coffin, delighting in these bold encounters, immediately attacked him with the boom of the sail, which, being made of light pine wood, was soon shivered in a dozen pieces by contact with the iron head of the huge monster; he then took one of the oars, and desired the child to steer against the boatman's remaining oar. During the conflict, which had occupied an hour and a half, they had drifted upwards of a mile down the river; assistance became necessary, for at one time, the bear had his fore paws and half his body inside the boat. A ready thrust in the mouth, threw him back into the river, but he instantly rallied, and made an attack on the child, passing his hideous paw over the seat, from which the boatman had removed her not a minute before. Seeing her father's strength failing, for his blows became slower and not so well directed, she disobeyed his positive orders, and shrieked for help, with all the strength which an agony of terror supplied; instantly a well manned skiff, rowed by some of the tenant's sons, who delighted in these wild frays, shot out from the opposite bank, and almost flying over the water, dashed up to the scene of action, just as the well battered head of the now beaten foe, sank beneath the surface of the stream. The Colonel thanked the lads for their good intentions, and desired them to take the bear back to the Manor House, while he went on to the town, as quietly, as if no such interlude had taken place; like many other incidents of a similar nature, he never named it.

Settlers soon flocked into the province. Ten years residence, with Major Coffin's activity aided by his willing men, had made it a respectable and desirable settlement; he was made a Magistrate of the county which was called the King's county, and in due time a Member of the Provincial Parliament and of the Legislative Council, which offices he filled very efficiently, till within a few years of his death. Many minor situations he also held, with credit to himself and much benefit to others.

Though the province improved, the difficulty of obtaining labour was great, the war in Europe eventually taking every

available man, the only labourers were the settlers and their sons, and occasionally an emigrant from the United States. Many Royalists came down from Massachusetts and other parts of the United States, and settled in various parts of the province, the Winslows, Saunders, Hazons, Chipmans, &c. &c.

In the end of June, 1794, His Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent, who was Governor of Nova Scotia, came to pay an official visit to the province, in a barge pulled by the crew of the ship, which was commanded by H. R. H. the Duke of Clarence, his brother, who accompanied him. They stopped at Alwington Manor, and honored Major and Mrs. Coffin with their company, at the same time graciously permitting one of their younger children, a boy, born a few days previously, to be named Henry Edward, after them. The position of Major Coffin, and his unfair treatment, were pointed out to their Royal Highnesses, by Captain Smith, their Aide-de-camp, but they could do nothing for their ill used host, as things went on in their usual way at home (i.e. England) at that time; but in 1804 a strong application was made by Mr. Barwell, who had married the youngest sister of Major Coffin, to the Prince of Wales, whom he had often entertained at his magnificent seat, Stanstead Park, Sussex, for the promotion of his brother-in-law; in this he was assisted by the Marquis of Hastings, Lord Rawdon, the Earl of Kingston, Lord Dorchester, many other old and influential friends, and also his younger brother, Rear Admiral Sir Isaac Coffin, of the Royal Navy, himself a very brave and distinguished officer, and much thought of, in England. After much time and trouble had been expended, these kind and zealous friends at last succeeded in getting him advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel: he was immediately ordered to England, to be presented to His Majesty George the III. who had been so long his enemy. Colonel Coffin sailed for Scotland in the month of December, and arrived in January, 1805, where he was greeted by many of his old companions in arms, and by whose side he had fought during the American war; they received him most hospitably, passing him on from one to another, recollecting and recounting many a tale of his gallant deeds, and chivalrous bearing to all. In May, 1805

Colonel Coffin left Scotland for London, where he was kindly received by the Commander-in-chief, at the Horse Guards, and presented to His Majesty George the III. at a levee, who was much pleased with his appearance and manner, for he looked and bore himself, like the hero he was; he was six feet two inches high, with a handsome face, fine figure, gentle and polite in his manner, and possessed of a reputation for *brave* and *good* deeds that challenged the admiration of all ranks, and made him respected and loved by his friends.

Colonel Coffin was immediately offered the command of a Regiment, but this he declined, as, from the circumstance of his promotion being so long withheld, he would have had to serve under officers, when in the field, much younger than himself, but who had been more fortunate in their promotion, for he ought, at that time, to have been a Major General. Having so large a stake in the province of New Brunswick, Colonel Coffin returned to his adopted country in August, 1805, where he continued his career of active usefulness, his hand, heart, and purse being open to all applications for assistance. In addition to being a member of the Legistable Council, member of the Provincial Parliament, he became Chairman of the Quarter Sessions of King's County, Commissioner for the Indians, &c. &c.

The growing prosperity of the province enabled the Colonel to keep his head above water, but even that at times, was hard work, with a young and constantly increasing family to provide for, and both provisions and clothing scarce and dear; however in some things he was very much benefitted, for stock and corn sold well. In 1810 the United States put an embargo on all produce being shipped to England, or any of her colonies, which caused a rise in the price of all food. In the year 1811, it was evident that the United States intended to go to war with England, and that the colonists would be obliged to protect themselves. Colonel Coffin then offered the Government to raise a Regiment which he was to command, and that it should be a local corps; in 1812 he commenced raising the Regiment, and soon got together 400 men, a timely assistance which placed the 104th Regiment at the disposal

of Government to send to Canada, where the inhabitants of both the upper and lower provinces were hard pressed by the invasion of the United States Troops; and by the year 1813 he had raised a Regiment of 600 fine young men, born in the province of New Brunswick, the parents of whom were almost all known to their kind and gallant Commander. At the peace of 1815, the Colonel was promoted to the rank of Major General, and had he received his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel as was his right, at the peace in 1783, he would, in 1815, have been high up in the list of General Officers. His fine Regiment called the "New Brunswick Fencibles," was disbanded when peace was proclaimed, and in 1816, General Coffin returned once more to half-pay; then his visits to England became frequent, and in 1817, Mrs. Coffin and all the family left New Brunswick to reside in England, the family of Coffin having been absent from their country during 172 years. General Coffin returned to New Brunswick every Spring, to superintend his large landed property there; his last visit to England took place in the year 1829; in 1832, his second son, Captain John Townsend Coffin, of the Royal Navy, went out to reside near his father, and in 1838, on the 12th May, it pleased God to remove this great and good man, to a better and a happier world, and at last to give him rest from his weary labours, and many disappointments.

He was an exemplary character, both in public and private life; had he lived and thus acted in these times, and in his native land, he would have gone to the grave with more honours, though he could scarcely have been more respected, beloved, and regretted. As it was, he was too far out of sight, and so his services were not duly appreciated, nor sufficiently rewarded. General and Mrs. Coffin had a large family, but out of ten children only eight lived to grow up. The eldest son, General Guy Carleton Coffin, died in April, 1856, at the age of seventy-three, a General Officer of the Royal Artillery. The second and third sons are in 1860, still living; the second, an Admiral; the third, Captain in the Royal Navy; five daughters, of whom there are three now living, all married well, and had families, so that General and Mrs. Coffin had the

satisfaction of seeing all of their children who had lived to grow up, comfortably settled in life.

Extract from a New Brunswick Newspaper of May, 1838.

"Died, on Saturday the 12th instant, at his residence in King's County, General JOHN COFFIN, aged 82 years, being born in the year 1756.

"General Coffin commenced his Military career as a Volunteer at the battle of Bunker's Hill,—soon rose to the rank of Captain in the Orange Rangers, from which he exchanged into the New York Volunteers, and with that corps went to Georgia in 1778. At the battle of Savannah, at that of Hobkirk's Hill, under Lord Rawdon, at the action of Cross Creek, near Charlestown, and on various other occasions, he conducted himself in the most gallant manner. On the 8th September, 1781, the battle of Eutaw was commenced by Brevet Major Coffin, who highly distinguished himself, and to such an extent as to draw forth the admiration of the American General Greene, in his despatches to Congress. The following General Order, dated New York, 28th August, 1782, was for those various services issued:—

"Sir Guy Carleton, Commander-in-chief.

"Brevet Major John Coffin, of the New York Volunteers, having repeatedly received the public thanks of the principal officers under whose command he has served, and on the 8th September, 1781, being only twenty-five years of age, having distinguished himself very particularly, is for those services appointed Major of the King's American Regiment, vacant by the death of Major Grant."

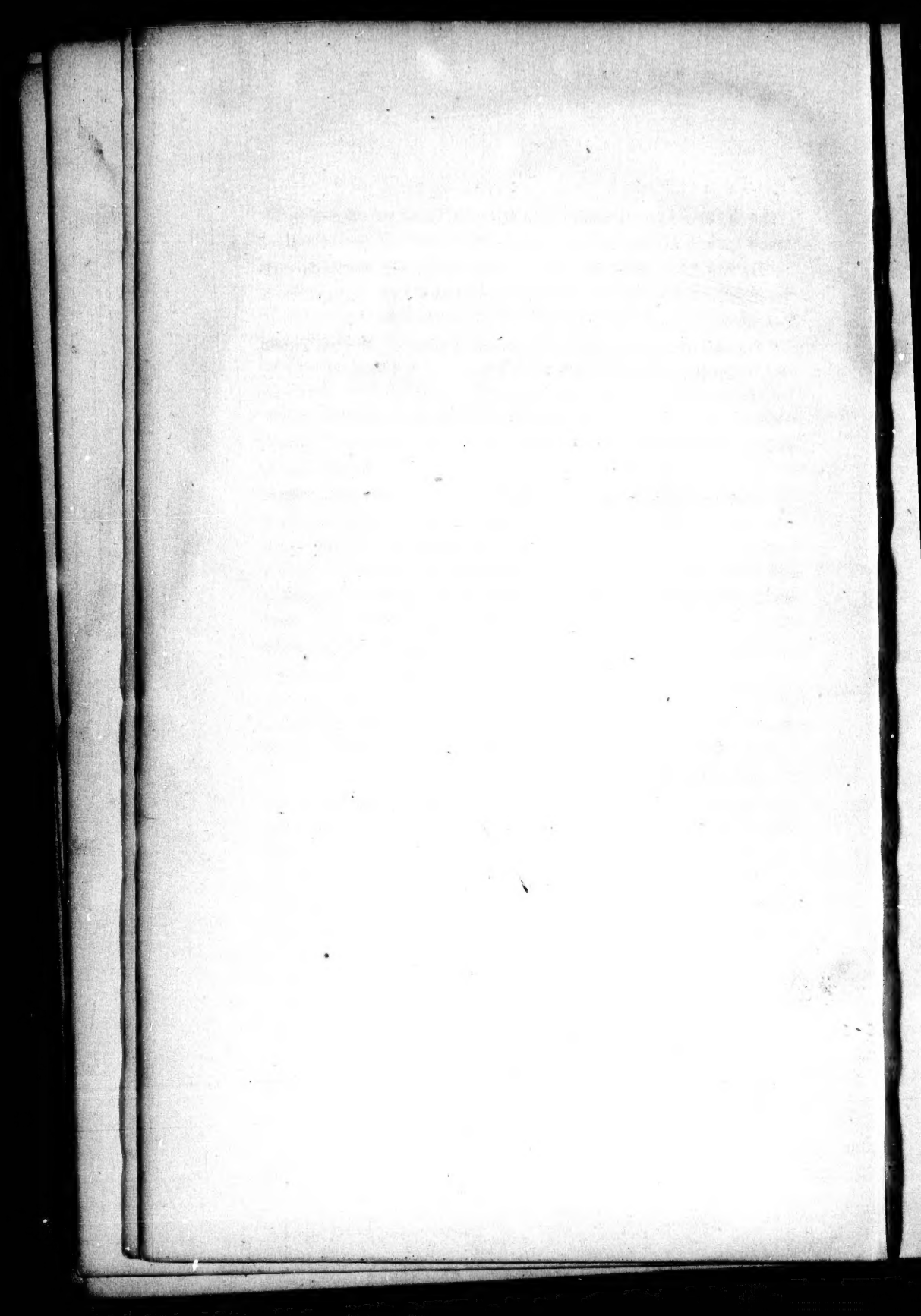
"At the Peace of 1783, Major Coffin retired with his family to this Province, where he has resided ever since, and where he filled the situations of Representative to the House of Assembly, for King's—a Member of Council, and Chief Magistrate of King's County, for many years. During the last American War, he raised a Regiment, which was disbanded again in 1815.

"By nature and habit industrious, and possessing talents of great extent for public business, his life has been of much advantage to those around him, who have long been in the habit of consulting

"him on their various affairs, and the poor have ever found him a
 "kind though unostentatious friend.

"He has left a wife and large family to lament his departure,
 "though his advanced period of life, must have long prepared them
 "for such an event.

"Funeral from the residence of his son, Captain Coffin, on Thurs-
 "day morning, at ten o'clock.



Since this memorial was printed, the following mark of good fellowship between the State of Massachusetts and General Coffin has been discovered, and is now inserted at the end of this work :—

General Coffin having presented a very valuable Entire Horse for the purpose of improving the breed in that State, a handsome Gold Medal was awarded to him, bearing the following inscription :—

“Extract from the Records of the Trustees of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture, January 23rd, 1821. Voted, that the M. S. for P. A. receive with great sensibility the generous donation made to the Society by the Honourable John Coffin, General in the British Service, of a fine Stud Horse of the light cart breed, and that they will use their best exertions to render the said donation beneficial to the Commonwealth, the Native State of General Coffin, also that a Medal be presented to him, and that he be admitted an Honorary Member of the Society for Life.”